



# Evaluation of the English Access Microscholarship Program



**Executive Summary • October 2007**

## *Evaluation Highlights*

The **English Access Microscholarship Program** (Access Program) is highly effective in providing a significant English language learning experience to non-elite 14 to 18 year old students. The Access Program also helps students develop a greater appreciation for U.S. culture and values, increases their self-confidence, encourages critical thinking and open-mindedness, and improves their performance in regular school classes. To date, approximately 20,000 students in 44 countries in Africa (AF), East Asia and the Pacific (EAP), Europe (EUR), the Near East (NEA), and South and Central Asia (SCA) have enrolled in the Program. The following are highlights from the Access Program evaluation conducted in 2006 by the State Department's Public Diplomacy Evaluation Office (PDEO) in Morocco, Lebanon, Oman, India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan:

*"We had very [little] information about the United States, but after the Access Program, our information improved a lot ..., and I think all of us here have a very positive view about the U.S."*

- Access student in Morocco



Access students in Ahmedabad, India (April 2006)



Access students in Halba, Lebanon (April 2006)

- Access students reported a more favorable view of the American people due to their participation in the Access Program (**87.5%**).
- Access students rated the English skills they developed due to the Access Program as good or excellent in the following categories: **91.8%** in reading; **85%** in writing; **84%** in speaking; **83.5%** in understanding spoken English; and **77.7%** in grammar.
- Access students reported sharing knowledge from their Access classes with family and peers (**89.5%**).
- Access students reported that they support democratic principles, including rule of law, equal rights under the law, the importance of voting, and free and fair elections. (**90.0%**)
- Access students feel that the Access Program helped them in their regular school subjects and courses (**92.7%**).
- Parents said they would encourage their other children to participate in the Access Program (**96.3%**).
- More than half of the Access students reported more favorable views of the U.S. Government due to their participation in the Access Program (**54.3%**).

## ***Access Program Description & History***

The English Access Microscholarship Program provides non-elite 14 to 18 year old students in 44 countries with significant Muslim populations English language instruction through a U.S.-style classroom experience. The overarching goals of the Program are for students to gain an appreciation for American culture and democratic values, acquire sufficient English language skills to increase their ability to successfully participate in the socio-economic development of their countries, and improve their chances of participation in future U.S. educational and exchange programs.

The first Access Program began in Casablanca, Morocco, in May 2003 with 17 students. In January 2004, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) formally inaugurated the Program. Since its inception, the Access Program has received funding from ECA, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (R), and regional Public Diplomacy (PD) bureaus. In October 2005, the Office of English Language Programs in ECA assumed central management and funding responsibility of the Access Program. At the local level, Access programs are managed directly by Public Affairs Sections (PAS) with assistance from ECA and Regional English Language Officers (RELOs).

## ***Effectiveness of the Access Program***

This section details the effectiveness of the Access Program in meeting the following programmatic goals:

- 1) provide a significant English language learning experience to students in a cost-effective manner (approximately \$1,000 per student) to maximize the number of students reached;
- 2) provide direct English teaching to non-elite students living in underserved neighborhoods;
- 3) engage in the design and implementation of a transparent Access student selection process; and
- 4) recognize student achievement through award certificates signed by the U.S. Ambassador.

**Significant English Language Learning Experience** Although programs varied widely in the number of hours of instruction and their duration, most programs include two years of instruction ranging from 240 to 640 classroom hours. This length is deemed sufficient by Access local administrators and teachers to provide students with a significant learning experience and advance one or more levels in their English language proficiency. Access students surveyed are proud of their English acquisition and mentioned that they could participate in English conversations, obtain better jobs, understand English-language websites, and apply to college or university due to their new ability.

**Cost-Effectiveness**—The Access Program is a cost-effective program. The average cost per student in the six countries surveyed for FY 2004 was \$1011.38 and for FY 2005 was \$917.71. The spread of per student cost during FY 2005 between \$138 at one site in India and the \$1,785 at two sites in Oman is attributable to the type of in-country educational service provider, the facility infrastructure, student transportation costs, and the relative cost of living in the various countries.

**Intended Population**—In all of the countries evaluated, the students served by the Access Program are considered to be non-elite by standards of the country. Most of the programs are based in underserved urban areas. Morocco and Lebanon, at the time of this evaluation, had expanded their programs to include rural communities as well.

**Student Selection Process**—The Access Program has a transparent student selection process involving a written assessment of the applicant's writing skills, an entrance test, and/or an interview with the program administrator and teachers. In some cases, several programs maintain waiting lists of students who completed the assessment process but were not selected for the Program. Students from these lists are invited to join the Program if others are unable to complete the Program.

**Award Certificates**—Students in the countries surveyed in the SCA region received award certificates at the beginning of the program, while students in the countries surveyed in the NEA region received their certificates at the completion of the program. In both cases, the award is signed by the U.S. Ambassador or his/her designee.

## *Evaluation Findings*

### **Views of the United States**

- The Access Program improved the views of students towards the American people and the U.S. Government; the overwhelming majority (**87.5%**) report a more favorable or much more favorable view of the **American people**; and more than half (**54.3%**) report a more favorable or much more favorable view of the **U.S. Government**.
- More than half of the Access students (**64.0%**) agree or strongly agree that the United States is a trustworthy partner for their countries.

*"Before the Access Program ... I had kind of a negative image about [Americans], but after joining the Program ... I have a very different view."*

- Access student in Morocco

### **Language Acquisition & Improved Academic Performance**

- The overwhelming majority of Access students rated the English skills they developed due to the Access Program as good or excellent in the following categories: **91.8%** in reading; **85%** in writing; **84%** in speaking; **83.5%** in understanding spoken English; and **77.7%** in grammar.
- Almost all students, **92.7%**, felt that the Access Program helped them in their regular school courses (**94.4%** - SCA and **90.4%** - NEA).

*"In today's world, we need to know English to communicate with others, and so when the U.S. State Department offered us help to learn English, we were overwhelmed...."*

- Access student in Bangladesh

### **Knowledge of the United States**

- More than half of Access students reported having at least basic knowledge of freedom of speech and the press (**60.2%**); daily life in the United States (**56.0%**); U.S. values and culture (**55.1%**); and religious and ethnic diversity in the U.S. (**51.6%**) due to the Program.
- More than half of the Access parents (**66.9%**) believed that their children gained a greater understanding of U.S. culture or society through the Access Program.

*"If I compare my knowledge [of the U.S.] now and before the Access Program, I think that now I know much more information ... through our direct contact with Americans, we have had the chance to discover a new culture and traditions."*

- Access student in Morocco

### **Sharing Knowledge About English and the United States**

- An overwhelming majority of Access students reported sharing knowledge from the Access classes with parents, siblings, and peers (**94.4%** - SCA; **84.5%** - NEA).
- **73.0%** of Access parents reported that their own English language skills have improved since their child started in the Access Program; and **81.0%** reported being motivated to learn English due to their child's progress in learning English.

*"Every night after the end of the class, I go home and share with my family all the things I learned."*

- Access student in Oman

### **Democratic Principles**

- At least **90.0%** of Access students stated that they support democratic principles, including rule of law, equal rights under the law, the importance of voting, and free and fair elections.

*"[We learned] about democracy; before this we only knew about Pakistani culture, but now we know about Americans...[and] their culture."*

- Access student in Pakistan

### **Leadership Skills & Professional Development**

- More than **80%** of Access students believe they have developed good or excellent leadership skills due to the Program.
- **91.0%** of respondents said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the relevance of the Program to their professional or educational development.

*"After completing the Access Program, I would like to study for three years in the university, major in English literature, and I hope to have the chance later to go for higher education in the United States."*

- Access student in Morocco

## **Evaluation Purpose & Goals**

In September 2005, the Public Diplomacy Evaluation Office of the U.S. Department of State selected the Aguirre Division of JBS International, Inc. to conduct a pilot evaluation of the English Access Microscholarship Program.

The pilot evaluation studied the Access Program in three countries in the Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) region—Morocco, Lebanon, and Oman—and three countries in the South and Central Asia (SCA) region—India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. The evaluation goals set out by the Public Diplomacy Evaluation Office were to: collect data from students, administrators, and teachers to better manage the Program; assess initial impact of the Access Program on students and their families; determine if the Access Programs in Morocco, Lebanon, Oman, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are meeting ECA goals; provide suggestions for refinement of the goals and standards for the Access Program; and provide recommendations for worldwide management and monitoring guidelines.

## **Evaluation Methodology**

This evaluation incorporated both a formative evaluation component and a retrospective assessment of the Access Program in six countries. Data collection consisted of quantitative and qualitative methods, i.e., in-depth individual interviews, survey questionnaires, focus groups, discussion groups, and classroom observations. Data were gathered from PAS staff, RELOs, Access Program administrators/principals, selection committee members, teachers, students, peers of students, and parents of students.

Field work was conducted in 27 Access schools and centers in April and May of 2006. Interviews and survey protocols were conducted in English and in six local languages—Arabic, Bangla/Bengali, Hindi, Gujarati, Tamil, and Urdu (according to the preference of the student, peer, or parent). In addition, field work included 19 class observations and 13 student focus groups/discussion groups. The evaluation team surveyed 613 students, 137 peers, 136 parents, 35 teachers, and 21 administrators (see Table 1). The evaluation had 942 total study respondents. In addition, the evaluation conducted interviews with PAS staff in New Delhi (India), Chennai (India), Dhaka (Bangladesh), Lahore (Pakistan), Rabat (Morocco), Beirut (Lebanon), and Muscat (Oman), along with four RELOs.

**Table 1: Sample Survey Numbers**

	Students	Peers	Parents	Teachers	Administrators	TOTAL
<b>NEA Region</b>						
Lebanon	83	20	20	4	4	131
Morocco	102	25	26	4	4	161
Oman	86	11	9	5	5	116
<b>Regional Total</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>408</b>
<b>SCA Region</b>						
Bangladesh	55	N/A*	N/A*	4	1	60
India	157	49	48	12	3	269
Pakistan	130	32	33	6	4	205
<b>Regional Total</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>534</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>613</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>942</b>

\* Peers and parents were not interviewed in Bangladesh at the request of U.S. Embassy Dhaka.



## Overall Evaluation Conclusions

**PAS Program Management**—One of the hallmarks of the Access Program is the significant flexibility Public Affairs Sections have in choosing the in-country educational service providers that are appropriate and relevant to local needs and conditions in the participating countries. This important factor contributes to the success of the Access Program.

**In-country Educational Service Providers**—The Access Program is based upon the professional knowledge the Public Affairs Sections have of in-country educational service providers, which include non-governmental organizations (NGOs), commercial language centers, universities, and schools. The in-country educational service provider, in many cases, is responsible for selecting the final curriculum, class structure, and the teachers. Therefore, the provider's knowledge of English teaching methods is extremely important to the quality of the Program.

**High Quality English Teachers**—Teachers are the linchpin in delivering quality instruction. The teachers' command of English and ability to create a student-centered classroom environment affect the learning experience. For many students, the Access Program is the first experience they have with a participatory classroom experience and critical thinking skills. Therefore, the Program fills an educational gap beyond English proficiency. However, in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Oman, the shortage of qualified and experienced English teachers was mentioned by the Program administrators, principals, PAS staff, and RELOs. Identifying qualified teachers will be very important for the Program's expansion in many countries.

**Awareness of U.S. Government Sponsorship**—The sponsorship of the Program—as a U.S.-funded program called English Access Microscholarship Program—is well-established in most centers and schools. Most students and parents, were aware that the Access Program is funded by the U.S. Government. In some programs, students receive mugs, t-shirts, bags, or baseball caps emblazoned with “Access Program” and refer to the program as “Access” or “Access Program.” However, during the course of this evaluation, some students, teachers, and administrators reported that the Program was provided by the in-country educational service provider or by the government of their country.

**Alumni Involvement**—At the time of data collection, Morocco was the only Access Program that had alumni. A group of alumni in Morocco was in the process of forming an alumni association in order to maintain their connections with other students and teachers from the Access Program. In Bangladesh, the top 10 Access students in the first cohort received scholarships from the Language Proficiency Center (a commercial language center) to continue in the center's regular English classes. In all six countries, Access students and alumni stated their interest in maintaining their connection with other students and teachers from the Access Program and continuing to learn English.

**Materials**—The administrators and teachers emphasized the difficulty of finding age-appropriate material at a beginning language level. In all six countries evaluated, the providers reported that they invested significantly in purchasing supplemental materials or adapting the curriculum to be more relevant to the cultural context of students.

*“I really like our teacher's system. He always starts by talking about the things we have done during the weekend or holidays. He always creates a discussion and finds ways to make things interesting and entertaining.”*

*- Access student in Morocco*

## Recommendations

**Expand the Access Program**—This evaluation demonstrated the effectiveness of the Access Program in providing youth significant English language learning and increasing appreciation of U.S. culture and values in a cost-effective manner. This evidence provides compelling justification for expanding the Access Program beyond the current 44 countries and increasing the number of Access students worldwide.

**Maintain Program Adaptability and Flexibility**—Every Access school and center recommended that the Access Program maintain its flexibility in order to respond to the needs and constraints of the local communities. The Program's flexibility has been a hallmark since its inception and should be preserved in order to permit posts and administrators to custom-design locally-relevant components of the Program.

**Continue Awareness of the U.S. Government Sponsorship**—Consistent awareness of the U.S. Government sponsorship of the Access Program is important for meeting the mission and goals of the Program. Administrators, teachers, students, and parents should know that the Access Program is a U.S. government-funded program designed to improve English language skills and expose students to U.S. culture and values. Visits from the Ambassador, Foreign Service Officers, and other Americans to Access schools and centers foster heightened interest and enthusiasm among students, teachers, and administrators.

**Continue Development of Structures to Encourage and Maintain Contact with Alumni**—Wherever feasible, an Access alumni club or group should be established in each country. Over time an online Access alumni network could be established. This would reinforce program awareness of U.S. Government sponsorship, help students who complete the Program maintain their English, and provide a sense of community to the students of the Program.

### **Increase In-Country In-Service Training or Enhancement Workshops for Access Teachers**

Many teachers expressed strong interest in participating in in-country in-service teacher training workshops on best practices and innovative U.S.-style teaching methods. Many teachers would benefit from additional exposure to U.S. culture and values, access to a kit of resource materials on the United States, and/or a video on life in the United States.

### **Begin Access Classes at Fourteen Years of Age**

Give serious consideration to the timing of the Access Program and begin the Program at the ages of 14 to 15. In some cases, Access students ages 17 to 18 were studying for important national exams, and absenteeism became a problem; some schools and centers suspended the Access classes until after the exams.

### **Utilize Existing Course Materials for Access Classrooms**

The publications and materials available on the website of the *English as a Foreign Language Publication Catalog*—(<http://exchanges.state.gov/education/engteaching/pubs>)—should be made known to the wider audience of Access teachers and administrators, as a supplemental resource.

### **Provide Opportunities for Cross-Fertilization of Programs**

All Public Affairs Officers and the Office of English Language Programs should arrange opportunities for Access programs to share their models, their challenges, and their successes. In addition, Access programs should encourage Access students to participate in future U.S. educational and exchange programs.

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